

# CHRISTINE LAAKSO

## A STEP AHEAD

FITCHBURG HIGH SCHOOL

A photograph of Christine Laakso, a senior at Fitchburg High School, running on a red track. She is wearing a red and white athletic uniform. The background shows a grassy field and some trees under a cloudy sky.

*This Fitchburg High School senior got her scholarship the old-fashioned way – she earned it!*

**T**wo-thirty in the afternoon of Tuesday, November 18, holds a special meaning for Fitchburg High School senior Christine Laakso. It's the moment she proudly signed her letter of intent to attend Boston University on a full athletic scholarship for cross-country and track. Some people call such scholarships a "free ride," but there's nothing free about this one. Laakso earned every last cent of her scholarship through unrelenting dedication and discipline.

Just three days earlier Laakso was busy racking up a second-place finish in the Massachusetts State Cross-Country Championships



at Northfield Mountain. Earlier in the season Laakso had won her first district and league cross-country championships. Think these impressive accomplishments came after years of moving up through the ranks? Think again: This was Laakso's first year of cross-country.

She'd been a soccer player from day one, winning letters in the sport in high school three years in a row. "I tried indoor track my freshman year just to keep in shape for soccer," says Laakso. "In my junior year I decided I liked running so much that I wanted to do

it year-round." Cross-country

coach Mark Ambrose is sure glad Laakso made that decision.





**'Laakso's work ethic, her incredible desire to improve and her drive to achieve her goals, are parallel with the best athletes I have ever coached.'** Ray Cosenza, Fitchburg High's athletic director.

Ambrose has coached cross-country at Fitchburg High for the past 28 years, and in 1989 his team won the state championship. Ambrose says Laakso is one of the best he has ever seen, and point out she holds the Fitchburg course record for cross-country and many indoor and outdoor school records. "She is definitely number one," said Ambrose, "a real class runner."

### **Ingredients for success**

So, if you're a young woman of 5-feet-3 and 105 pounds, how do you earn a full scholarship to a Division I university? Simple –you outwork everyone you compete against.

"I have coached, trained and observed many high school athletes in my 20-year coaching career, and I have never seen a more focused, organized and mentally tough young athlete when it comes to training," says



**Who says that cross-country isn't a rough sport. Here Laakso poses with some scrapes and bruises from a recent race.**

Ray Cosenza, Fitchburg High's athletic director and a BFS clinician. "Laakso's work ethic, her incredible desire to improve and her drive to achieve her goals, are parallel with the best athletes I have ever coached."

Laakso had dabbled with strength training during her freshman and sophomore years, but in her junior year she became a regular in the weightroom, lifting in the morning before school and utilizing the Bigger Faster Stronger Total Program. "I think it has played a big role in helping me," says Laakso. "I lifted in-season during outdoor track and continued the program all summer, and by the end of the summer the weight I was lifting was up a lot." In addition to training with weights,

Laakso ran 30 to 35 miles a week, no matter what the weather conditions. She also stretched daily and followed a healthy diet.

Laakso is a scholar-athlete





**Concentration as Laaso prepares mentally for the upcoming race**

in the truest sense of the word. She is ranked third in her class of 250 students, and her grade point average is 4.06 on a 4.5 scale. She is a member of the National Honor Society, a Gold "F" scholar candidate and a constant "special honor roll" student. Her class load this past fall consisted of AP Literature, AP Biology, Latin IV, Probability and Statistics, Comparative Anatomy and Physiology, and US Government. On her first-quarter report card Laakso received straight A's.

Achieving academic success is nothing new for the Laakso family. Laakso's parents, Lenny and Charline, have always stressed the importance of



**Victorious afterward Laasko speaks with local reporters.**

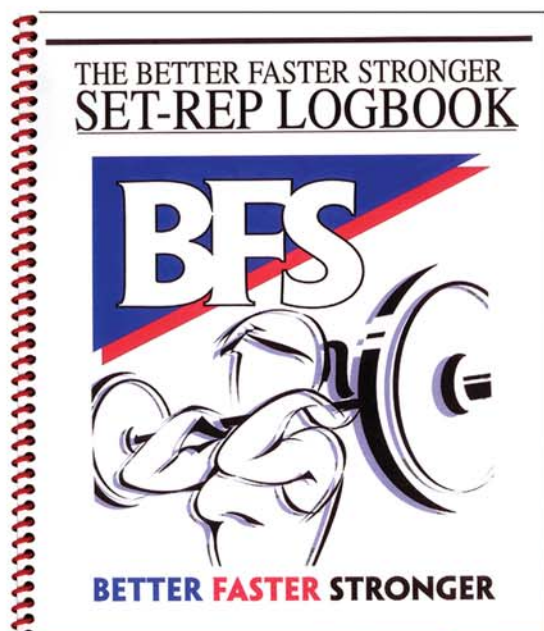
scholastic achievement. Their oldest son, Robert, graduated from Emerson College, second son Jim recently graduated from Yale University, and youngest son Tom is a sophomore at Harvard. Laakso of course is headed to Boston University, and her younger sister Sarah is an honor roll student at Academy Middle School in Fitchburg.

With such great models of academic achievement and her own athletic gifts, Christine Laakso is ready for new challenges next year at Boston U. She's not worried. Because when you're already an 11 on a scale of 1 to 10, it's bound to be a smooth ride. **BFS**



**So, if you're a young woman of 5-feet-3 and 105 pounds, how do you earn a full scholarship to a Division 1 university? Simple – you outwork everyone.**





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